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ABSTRACT

The relationship between employee turnover intentions and various predictors of turnover are examined in this study based on the theoretical framework of March and Simon's (1958) "decision to participate" model. Specifically, the predictors include desirability of movement (organizational commitment), ease of movement, job satisfaction, life interest, and selected demographic variables. Mailed questionnaires to 261 parish Louisiana Cooperative Extension home economics and agriculture agents yielded 240 returns, (a 92 percent response rate). Stepwise multiple regression analysis indicated that desirability of movement (organizational commitment) is the strongest single predictor of intention to quit an organization. Another finding is that organizational commitment and job satisfaction interact to form the desirability of movement component, suggesting that the strength of these variables should be determined before testing desirability of movement. One figure on the intention to quit the organization model is included. (18 references) (LMI)

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Factors Related to Organizational Turnover Intentions of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service Agents

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Factors Related to Organizational Turnover Intentions of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service Agents

The study expanded the theoretical framework of the March and Simon (1958) "decision to participate" model as modified by Jackofsky (1982, 1984) by examining the relationship between employee turnover intentions and various predictors of turnover. Desirability of movement (organizational commitment) was the best single predictor of intention to quit the organization.

A Paper Presented to the 3rd Annual Quality-of-Life Studies in Marketing & Management Conference, Blacksburg, VA, November, 1989.

Introduction

Understanding employee turnover in organizations is a phenomenon that has been of interest to both researchers and practitioners since 1900 (Price 1977). Results of such studies have been suggestive of various factors that contribute to turnover behavior. Mobley (1982), in a review of the turnover research literature, identified numerous variables related to employee turnover. While this research has aided both theorists and practitioners in predicting and explaining employee withdrawal, the proportion of variance in turnover behavior explained in these studies has been small (Mobley et al. 1979). As a result, there have been several recent reviews of the literature that identify the need for additional insight and more indepth consideration of the multivariate factors that are related to turnover behavior (Mobley et al. 1979, Mobley 1982.)

Continued attempts to explain and predict turnover behavior are understandable due to financial and other costs associated with the behavior. Another major consideration is the importance of studying the behavior of the individual employee as she/he relates to the organization. It is important to study the behavior of people within an organization since individuals and groups become the embodiment of the organization. To fully understand an organization in both a structural and qualitative sense, human activity within the organization must be analyzed. This behavioral study of individuals is an essential component to be analyzed by those interested in advancing the understanding of organizational effectiveness (Alfonse, Firth, and Neville 1981). The need for this research stems from the recognition of the important influence organizations have on the quality of individuals lives and as the framework that holds the larger society together.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to expand the theoretical knowledge of the March and Simon (1958) "decision to participate" model as modified by Jackofsky (1982, 1984) and examined by Jackofsky and Peters (1983). The conceptualization of this model is based on organizational effectiveness and its relationship to turnover. Specifically, the study examined the relationship between employee turnover intentions and various predictors of turnover, including a) desirability of movement (organizational commitment); b) ease of movement; c) the interaction of perceived desirability of movement (organizational commitment) and perceived ease of movement from the organization; d) job satisfaction; e) central life interest; and f) selected employee demographic variables. The demographic variables) may further explain the primary relationships described above. This prediction was based on the findings of such researchers as Peters, Bhagat, and O'Conner (1981) and Jackofsky and Peters (1983).

Turnover Models

Much of the turnover research has been based on individual choice models, with the March and Simon (1958) model providing the basis for many of the subsequent turnover models.

March and Simon Model

The March and Simon (1958) model is recognized as one of the earliest and most influential integrative models of the turnover process (Mobley 1982). This "decision to participate" model has two distinct components: 1) the employee's perceived desirability of movement from the organization; and 2) the employee's perceived ease of movement from the organization. These two components were thought to interact there fore being related to individuals leaving the organization or making individual turnover decisions (Jackofsky

and Peters 1983). The theory suggests that individuals evaluate both factors simultaneously to arrive at a decision to stay or leave the organization.

The March and Simon (1958) model and its related research serve as the basis for the development of more recent models (Mobley 1977, Mobley et al. 1979, Price 1977, Steers and Mowday 1981). These researchers utilized the same propositions and concepts but placed predictor variables in different sequences. However, even when the order of prediction or specific content varied, each focused on two primary factors (analogous to desirability of leaving and ease of movement) leading to turnover.

Mobley Model

The Mobley (1977) "intermediate linkages" model has been the focus of more recent research efforts (see Figure 1). The model expanded on the March and Simon (1958) work to include the concept of "withdrawal cognition." The Mobley (1977) model suggested that several intermediate steps took place before the actual decision to quit, including "thinking of quitting," "intention to search," and "intention to quit/stay." This model was also derived from findings by March and Simon (1958) suggesting that dissatisfaction with one's job must coexist with an employee's awareness of more or better alternatives before an employee would actually decide to leave the organization. The variable, "intention to quit/stay", has especially received considerable support in the literature and is considered to be the precursor to actual turnover. It has been the strongest and most consistent predictor of actual turnover (Miller, Katerberg, and Hulin 1979; Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth 1978; Mobley et al. 1979). This conclusion is consistent with the behavioral intentions theory of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, p. 368), who have determined that there "should be a high relation between a person's intention to perform a certain behavior and the actual performance of

that behavior". They suggest that the simplest way to determine if a person will perform a given behavior is to ask whether she/he intends to perform the behavior.

Mobley et al. (1979) recommended that future turnover research deal not only with the work environment and external alternatives but also with the centrality of work from the employee's perspective. He suggested that employee work values may moderate the linkages in the turnover model (Mobley 1982). One of the possible moderating variables is central life interests (CLI)--the employee's involvement in or values regarding work versus non-work activities. The degree to which work values and interests are central to an individual's life may attenuate relationships among satisfaction, expectations regarding present and alternative jobs, turnover intentions, and turnover behavior (Mobley et al. 1979). Said differently, employees for whom work values and interests are central may remain in an organization regardless of dissatisfaction or other employment alternatives.

Dubin, Champoux, and Porter (1975) found that a higher central life interest in work was consistent with a strong desire to maintain organizational membership and that employees with the highest central life interest in work also had the highest commitment to the organization. Dubin's research also indicated that central life interest in work had a positive relationship to the evaluation of the work environment (Dubin, Champoux, and Porter 1975). Further, Marsh and Mannari (1977) found a significant negative relationship between primacy of work values and turnover; that is, employees with a stronger central life interest in work were less likely to leave an organization.

Researchers have also identified several demographic variables as having a significant relationship to both turnover and organizational

commitment (Mobley, 1982). These demographic variables, though not necessary for a test of the moderating variables in the Jackofsky model, are recognized as helpful in interpreting results in a study. The variables that are most often included in turnover research include age, sex, and organizational tenure. Additional variables that may be important to this study are program area, program level, job/responsibility change, and spouse's employment status. Program area is the subject matter designation for the work focus of the Extension agent. Program level refers to the focus audience. Spouse's employment status refers to whether the spouse is in the paid labor force. Job change is a basic proposition of job design theorists and is recognized as consisting of either a promotion or an assignment to a different job classification and duties (responsibilities) without an increase in organizational level. Results of a field experiment conducted by Keller and Holland (1981) indicate that a job change, with or without a promotion, can be beneficial in a number of ways, with a primary benefit being a worker who is a more motivated and satisfied member of the organization. The researcher indicated that a new job may be more enriching and stimulating. This longitudinal study focused upon workers who had been promoted or had been assigned to a different job classification and duties during the year. No information was provided as to whether the change had been requested or if the moves were voluntary or involuntary.

Conceptual Model

The theoretical basis for the study is derived from the March and Simon (1958) "decision to participate" model that explains the motivation of individuals to remain in an organization in terms of the simultaneous evaluation of their "desirability of movement" from the organization and their "ease of movement" from the organization. This model has been modified,

tested, and expanded many times (Jackofsky 1982, 1984; Mobley 1977; Mobley et al. 1979). The Jackofsky (1982, 1984) expansion of the March and Simon model and the suggestions by Jackofsky and Peters (1983) for further refinement of the model form the conceptual framework for this study. The model of interest is multivariate in nature and explains the relationship between variables that directly and indirectly affect employee organizational turnover behavior intentions. It should be noted that though the Jackofsky (1984) model serves as a basis for this research, the model, when tested in its original form, was found to best predict job turnover rather than organizational turnover (Jackofsky and Peters 1983). The modified model in this study is specifically designed to predict organizational turnover, which is defined as movement away from the organization (see Figure 1). Recent research findings have supported the need for including organization specific variables when focusing on turnover behavior (Jackofsky and Peters 1983). Findings of the Jackofsky and Peters (1983) study indicated that in measuring desirability of movement from an organization, the usual indication of job satisfaction as a turnover determinant variable was a better predictor of job turnover, movement away from a specific job, than of organizational turnover, defined as movement away from the organization. Their suggestion was to use organizational commitment as a proxy measure of desirability of movement when the intent was to measure organizational turnover; that is, to use an organization-specific variable rather than a job-specific measure when one was measuring organizational turnover intention. Thus using organizational specific measures in the current research should provide for a more complete representation of the organizational turnover phenomenon.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Variables and Measures

Desirability of movement from the organization (organizational commitment) was measured by the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire OCQ, originally developed by Porter and his colleagues (Mowday et al. 1979). The OCQ consists of 15 items and is designed to measure employee commitment to work organizations. Cronbach's Alpha reliability for the 15 items in the OCQ for this population was .88.

The seven-item Ease of Movement measure, adapted from Jackofsky and Peters (1983) and Van Tilburg (1985) is designed to assess the extent to which persons believe they are able to find acceptable work elsewhere, either within or outside their current organization. The reliability for the seven-item scale used in this study with this population was .77.

Job Descriptive Index (JDI)

Job satisfaction was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) originally developed by Smith , Kendall, and Hulin (1969). Permission to use the 1975 version of the JDI was obtained from Bowling Green University, which holds the copyright. The JDI is designed to measure six theoretically and practically useful dimensions of job satisfaction; pay, promotion, supervision, type of work, the people on the job, and the job in general. Cronbach,s Alpha reliability for the population in this study for the six subscales and the overall satisfaction were computed. The reliabilities ranged from .69 to .90 for the subscales and .94 for the overall job satisfaction measure.

Central Life Interest CLI

The measure of Central Life Interest was designed to represent an activity that had an approximately equal likelihood of occurring in connection with some aspect of the job or work place, or at some definite point outside

of work. The Ben-Porat (1980) seven-item short form of the CLI designed to refer to work vis-a-vis other situations was used. The Alpha reliability for this population was .77.

Intention To Quit

The measure of Intention To Quit adapted for use in this study was originally developed by Peters and Jackofsky (Peters, Bhagat,and O'Conner 1981). The measure of intention to quit was operationalized to reflect the concept organizational quit intentions (organization-specific). The reliability for this population for the instrument used to measure intention to quit organization was .87.

RESULTS

Description of the Population

The 261 parish Extension home economics and agriculture agents employed by the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service in the traditional parish positions (adult, 4H/other youth, or combination adult-4-H/other youth) were invited to participate in the study via a mailed questionnaire. A total of 240 usable questionnaires were returned and included in the analyses. The response rate was 92 percent.

Age

The average age of the respondents was 41.8 years (s.d.=10.24) with majority (64%) of the agents between the ages of 26 and 45.

Tenure

The average length of time that an agent has been employed by the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service was 15.35 years (s.d.=8.72).

Job/Responsibility Change

104 agents (43%) reported having made a job/responsibility change within the organization within the past 5 years. Of these, 63 individuals reported a

voluntary change and 41 reported an involuntary change. One hundred thirty-five, or 56% of the agents had made no change.

Sex

The participants were 123 males and 117 females.

Program Level

The program level (audience assignment) of agents showed 116 (48%) were assigned to the adult program, 91 (38%) were assigned to the 4-H/other youth program, and 33 (13.7%) were assigned to the combination adult-4-H/other youth program level. The majority of the agents are responsible for only one audience.

Spouse's Employment

58.3% of the agents had spouses who worked full time. An additional 9.6% had part-time working spouses and 10.4% had non-employed spouses. Most Extension agents thus belong to dual-earner households.

Tests of Hypotheses

Six research hypotheses were formulated in this study that described predicted relationships between the independent variables [desirability of movement (organizational commitment), ease of movement, interaction of desirability of movement (organizational commitment) and ease of movement, central life interest, job satisfaction, selected demographic variables] and the dependent variable intention to quit the organization. Based on the theoretical framework, research hypotheses are stated in the directional form. One-tailed tests for statistical significance at the .05 level were used for examining relationships between independent and dependent variables. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were tested using the procedures described below.

Hypothesis 1: Desirability of movement (organizational commitment) will have a significant inverse relationship to employee intention to quit the

organization.

Hypothesis 2: Ease of movement will have a significant positive relationship to intention to quit the organization.

Hypothesis 3: The interaction of perceived desirability of movement (organizational commitment) and perceived ease of movement (inter-organizational job alternatives) will have a significant inverse relationship to employee intention to quit the organization. That is, individuals who perceive high levels of ease of movement and low levels of organizational commitment will be more likely to quit the organization. Individuals who perceive low levels of ease of movement and high levels of organizational commitment will be less likely to quit the organization.

These hypotheses were concerned with the relationship between desirability of movement (organizational commitment), ease of movement, and their interaction, and the dependent variable intention to quit. Pearson product-moment zero order correlations were used to show the relationships between all of the study variables. The simple bivariate correlation between organizational commitment and job satisfaction was .69, indicating a substantial amount of shared variance for these two variables, which poses a problem of multicollinearity in the subsequent analyses. A similar problem existed between the variables age and tenure as the simple bivariate correlation between these two variables approached .80. The analyses were conducted in spite of these concerns, but the results were interpreted in view of the limitations of multicollinearity.

A stepwise multiple regression analysis of the variables included in the model on intention to quit the organization produced the results in Table 1. Included in the table are the overall F statistic and the r-square, the unstandardized and standardized partial regression coefficients, the t-

statistic for each coefficient, and the associated probability levels. It is noted that the results of this type of analysis reflect the effect of the predictor variable or variables on the probability of occurrence of the dependent variable.

Insert Table 1 about here

Stepwise multiple regression was used to determine the best predictor(s) of the dependent variable intention to quit. This multiple regression analysis included the interaction of desirability of movement (organizational commitment) and ease of movement as a predictor variable. The computed interaction term was the product of the two variables, desirability of movement (organizational commitment) and ease of movement. If the interaction term enters the equation as a significant predictor of intention to quit the organization, there is evidence of the effect of the interaction in predicting the probability of the occurrence of the dependent variable.

In the current study, the predictor that entered the equation first (highest single correlation with dependent variable) and thus the most significant predictor of intention to quit the organization was desirability of movement (organizational commitment). The simple bivariate correlation between organizational commitment and intention to quit the organization was substantial (r=-.63). This single predictor accounted for 39.4% of variance in the model being tested. The second variable to enter the multiple regression equation was job/responsibility change. This second predictor explained an additional 1.2% of the variance, accounting for a small, but statistically significant, amount of the variance in the prediction of intention to quit. The F test for the model was significant when each of these predictor variables was added to the model. None of the other variables

under study made a significant contribution to the regression equation, indicating that they failed to explain any significant additional variance over and above that already accounted for. The best prediction model was represented by the combination of the desirability of movement (organizational commitment) variable and the job/responsibility change variable. This two-variable model accounted for 41% of the variance for intention to quit the organization (see Table 1).

No other model from this analysis will be discussed because the other 10 variables when combined explained less than an additional 2 percent variance. Thus, to add these additional variables to the model would be inefficient (see Table 1).

In looking at the correlation between the interaction term and intention to quit the organization, the simple bivariate correlation was moderate (r=-.42). It was statistically significant beyond the .0001 level. However, the interaction term did not enter the regression equation as a significant predictor. As far as the predicted interaction effect of organizational commitment and ease of movement in predicting intention to quit, support was not found for hypothesis 3.

It appeared that the variance partially accounted for by the significant bivariate correlation between the interaction term and intention to quit the organization could be largely explained in terms of the correlation between intention to quit and desirability of movement (organizational commitment). The variance increment for the ease of movement component was not significant.

Summary

In summary, the results of this study and the proposed expanded framework may contribute to a more comprehensive and integrative theory of commitment to the organization. Thus, this framework has implications for the

formulation of a more comprehensive theory of job and organizational turnover. This approach integrates the recognition that organizational commitment and job satisfaction, in addition to adding non-redundant sources of variation, may actually interact in forming the desirability of movement component of the decision to participate model. These findings suggest that rather than identifying either organizational commitment or job satisfaction as influencing intention to quit, it may be more appropriate to determine the relative importance of each within a population before testing the desirability of movement component of the decision to participate model. Additionally, no research has been found that discussed the weighting of either the desirability of movement or the ease of movement components of the model. All assumptions seem to imply an equal relationship of the components in the decision to participate model, and this research suggests this may not be the case.

The ease of movement measure does not seem to be as well researched as does the desirability of movement side of the model. It is suggested that a refinement and additional research focusing on the ease of movement scale may provide for additional insight into the relative contribution of each component in the prediction of future turnover. The Fishbein-Ajzen model (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) may be operating at as many as two levels within the intention to quit model. Additional research to identify the weights of each of the components in the model may prove of significance and could be used to guide and explain future research findings.

Finally, these data are consistent with prior research, indicating that, beyond commitment, job satisfaction may tend to have additional independent relationships to intention to quit the organization. Also, these data do provide some indirect support for the contention that organizational

commitment is an organization-specific variable and that a job-specific measure could be identified which would explain more of the variance in the model, depending upon whether the criterion measure was organization-specific or job-specific. For the criterion measure analyzed in this study, organizational commitment was the stronger predictor. This is consistent with the findings of others who suggest that commitment develops over time and is more useful as a global indicator of organizational turnover intentions than is job satisfaction, which is thought to vary with specific happenings related to various parts of one's job. Job satisfaction is also thought of as less dependent on time for development.

The continuing challenge for researchers studying effective organizations is to establish linkages between behaviors and attitudes that relate to organizational participation. Broadening our understanding of the effective organization through expansion of the decision to participate framework may identify additional approaches to the turnover problems in organizations.

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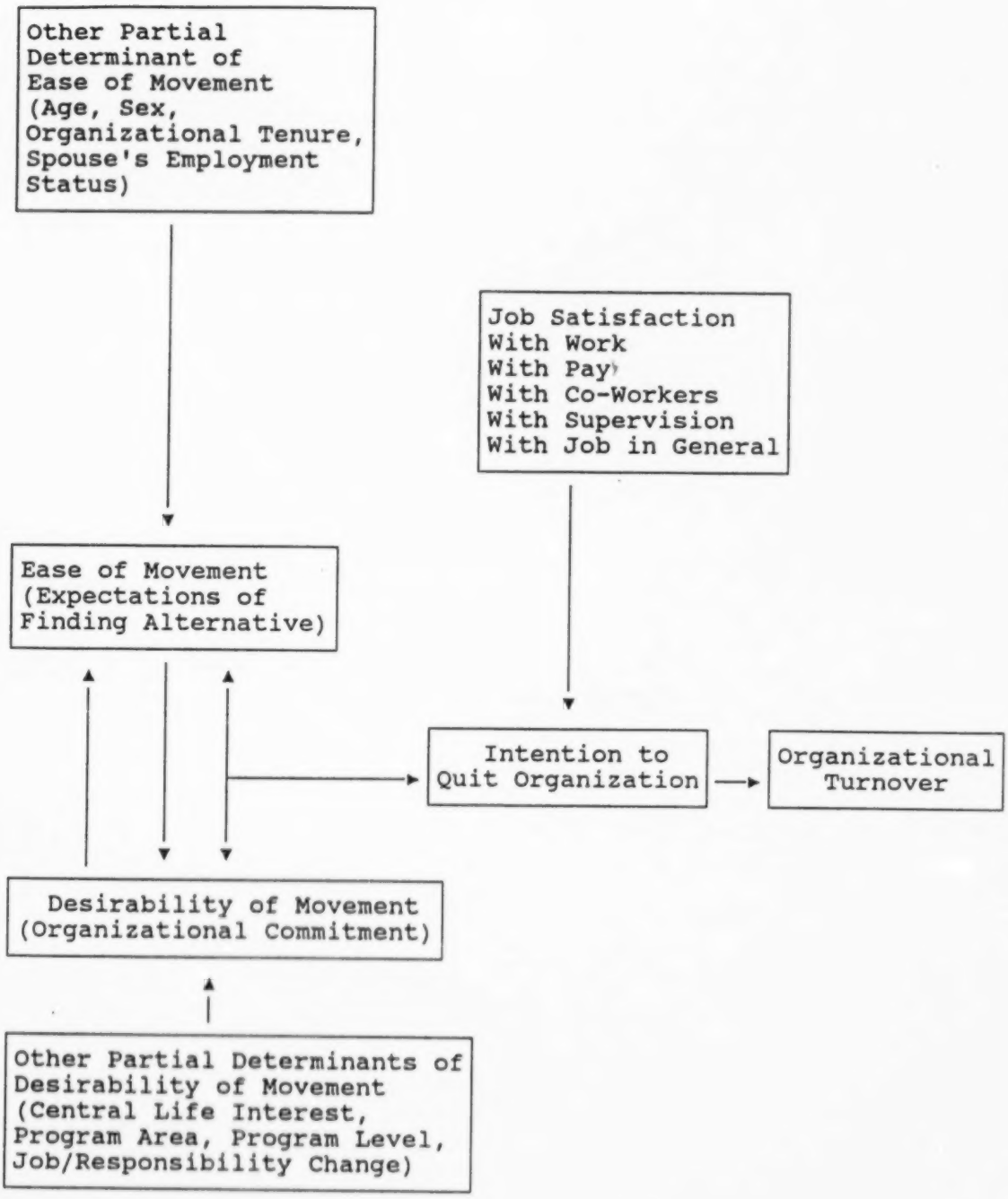
Other Partial Determinant of Ease of Movement (Age, Sex, Organizational Tenure, Spouse's Employment Status)
Job Satisfaction With Work With Pay With Co-Workers With Supervision With Job in General
Ease of Movement (Expectations of Finding Alternative)
Intention to Quit Organization
Organizational Turnover
Desirability of Movement (Organizational Commitment)
Other Partial Determinants of Desirability of Movement (Central Life Interest, Program Area, Program Level, Job/Responsibility Change)

Figure 1. Modified Model of Intention to Quit Organization.